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A MUGHAL CODE OF CONNOISSEURSHIP

The exercise of connoisseurship on Mughal paintings is practically irresistible. The paintings are varied in subject and have a level of formal detail which rewards sustained scrutiny. Because so many illustrated Mughal manuscripts are securely dated, most individual Mughal paintings can be dated to within a few years, and many are signed by or ascribed to individual artists. The availability of this kind of documentation has encouraged scholars to make extraordinarily subtle distinctions among the careers and personal styles of various imperial painters. Most scholars assume that the Mughal emperors had a similar focus on the artist, and point to Jahangir's singular claim to this brand of connoisseurship:

As regards myself, my liking for painting and my practice in judging it have arrived at such a point when any work is brought before me, either of deceased artists or of those of the present day, without the names being told me, I say on the spur of the moment that it is the work of such and such a man. And if there be a picture containing many portraits, and each face is the work of a different master, I can discover which face is the work of each of them. If any other person has put in the eye and eyebrow of a face, I can perceive whose work the original face is, and who has painted the eye and eyebrow.¹

We will never know the extent to which this oft-cited statement was colored by hyperbole, but the consistency with which the artist's name was recorded on or below Mughal paintings does suggest that Jahangir was not unique in his interest in the authorship of a painting. Accuracy of visual description was also an issue in some periods, as is evident from one anecdote of Jahangir directing an artist to make subtle changes to a portrait of a deceased figure unknown to him personally, but of whom one of his courtiers had a vivid recollection.² Yet Mughal connoisseurship involved aesthetic judgments about paintings as well. Here I can present new evidence that

on occasion the Mughals evaluated paintings in a surprisingly systematic fashion.

Inspection notes written on manuscripts in the imperial Mughal library reveal that Mughal librarians and their patrons regularly categorized the books they collected.³ They did so not by faculty of knowledge, which must have been obvious to the librarians, but by quality, rated on a scale from first to fifth class. These rankings were made for the book as a whole. They give greatest weight to calligraphy, as is clear from the low ranking of some profusely illustrated books and the high ones of other unillustrated books written by certain esteemed calligraphers. While this hierarchy of manuscripts impresses upon us the lesser importance accorded painting at the Mughal court, it sheds little light on how individual manuscript illustrations or independent paintings might have been assessed aesthetically.

There are some tantalizing hints of this kind of evaluation. In addition to a customary accession-day inscription by Shah Jahan, a detached *shamsa* of an illustrated *Dīwān* of Anwarī (fig. 1) bears a remarkable note by Jahangir:

[This] *Dīwān* of Anwarī, who is among the established poets of the *qaṣīda*, was completed in my workshop [at the order of this] supplicant at the Divine Court. Written by Nūr al-Dīn Jahāngīr, son of Akbar Pādshāh, in the year 1025 Hijrī [1616], corresponding to year 11 of the reign, in the city of Ajmer on Thursday. The writing is first-class (*awwal*), and there are three first-class paintings, with the rest second- and third-class by Rīzā 'Abbāsī. Value ten thousand rupees.

The manuscript and its paintings are now lost, but Jahangir's terse characterization of the writing and paintings signals a careful distinction in quality among the paintings, which, with the exception of those by the Persian artist Riza 'Abbasi, are not attributed. In this case at least, a painting's quality was apparently assessed without much concern for

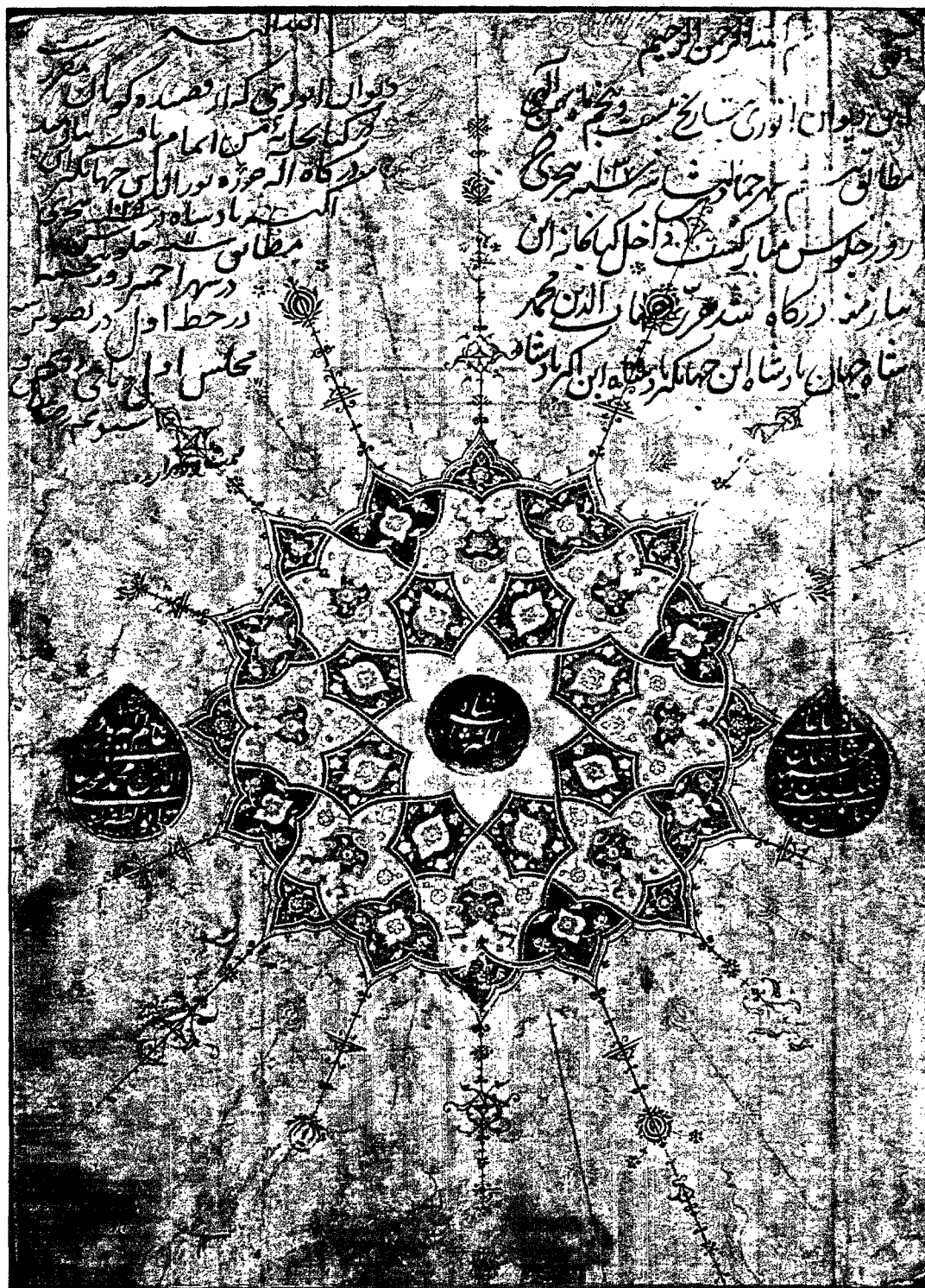


Fig. 1. Flyleaf of a lost *Divān* of Anwari inscribed by Jahangir and Shah Jahan. 30.5 × 17.8 cm. Private collection.

the identity of the particular artist who made it.

We draw closer to the Mughal system of qualitative evaluation with a handful of paintings with rankings written directly on them. The rankings take the form of ordinal numbers written at the bottom of the painting field or in the lower margin. The first example is a lightly colored painting which depicts an idealized royal figure receiving a dervish (fig. 2). An inscription in the upper right names the king as Shah Akbar and the artist as 'Abd al-Samad *Shirīn Qalam*. The painting, which dates to ca. 1585, is exceedingly fine in draftsmanship, a quality seen most obviously in the faces of the prince and dervish, and the sinuous contours and furry texture of the goat. Although the figures are inspired by Persian types, they are characterized by a distinctly Mughal sense of volume and facial expression; indeed, several of these figures and the somewhat reworked dog in the foreground seem more advanced in this direction than what we expect from 'Abd al-Samad, a Persian-trained master, and point to some sort of collaboration with Basavana, whose talents lay in this direction.⁴ But it is the word *awwal*, written discreetly in black on a rock along the lower edge, that concerns us here, for it is evidence that this particular painting was regarded as a first-class work. The placement of this word on the painting argues for its contemporaneity with the painting itself.

Of the twenty-four known illustrations from the British Library *Nafahāt al-Uns* dated 1604–5, three are singled out for similar qualitative acclaim, as is indicated by the presence of the word *awwal*, written in the lower margin in the same formal hand as the ascriptions.⁵ The first painting is by Padaratha, a relatively minor artist (fig. 3). Once more the *nīm qalam* style accentuates the drawing, which is accomplished but by no means extraordinary. The composition is absolutely formulaic for scenes with landscape settings, and the two figures themselves are no more than the standard types of holy men and youths, with no greater characterization of expression or volume than is found in scores of contemporary Mughal paintings. Thus it is hardly clear which qualities prompted this exalted assessment. The same can be said of a painting by Balacanda, a young artist who in 1605 had not yet reached the level of proficiency that later made him one of the leading artists of Shah Jahan's court.⁶ Color is applied sparingly, so that the effect once more is that of a tinted drawing. Balacanda sets his scene in a formulaic courtyard, add-

ing a touch of originality only in the unusual opening in the foreground wall. His figures, too, are small and unremarkable. Indeed, it is all but impossible to point to any feature which would elevate this painting above comparable works in the same manuscript, such as a painting by Madhava (fol. 263b), which in my opinion is more interesting visually by reason of the more animated faces, ambitious architecture, and assorted dogs.

The third painting in the *Nafahāt al-Uns* to be accorded the status of first-class work is a painting whose ascription is entirely lost but for the letter *kaf* (fig. 4). With this crucial bit of information, we can narrow the range of possible artists significantly, and can soon conclude that this is the work of Govardhana, who by this date was emerging as one of the premier imperial painters.⁷ Yet the painting does not depend upon this attribution to stand out from the other illustrations in the manuscript. The scene's imagery, which conveys the state of married bliss envisioned for Abu Bakr Duqqi by Abu al-Husayn Qarafi, is utterly original in every respect. Govardhana sets the visionary domestic scene in a humble hut, which he ambitiously situates obliquely in the composition and whose plain mud walls and simple wooden structure he carefully describes. All the figures are characterized in a compelling manner, from the gently modeled, white-robed wife drawing water at the household well, to the dog dozing at her feet, and the babe in its cradle happily sucking a toe. Most exceptional of all is the dignified Abu Bakr, engrossed in a book even as he keeps a mindful eye on his offspring and turns a blind one to the fowl prowling before him. Govardhana draws superbly, but he does not hesitate to enhance his central figure with a deep blue robe, its color enlivened by plays of white at the hem and a yellowish glint along the sleeve. Govardhana has surely learned the means of rendering such sophisticated modeling from European prints, but apart from the overly explicit folds in the cloth tucked beneath the baby and the golden-haired face of the child himself, he shows no obvious debt to any given model.

Thus we have the paradox of three very different paintings being extolled as first-class work. Their assessment is clearly not driven by authorship alone, since all three are by different artists.⁸ One might even say that although all three personal styles are well within the parameters of the late Akbari style, they have nothing obvious in common, being nei-

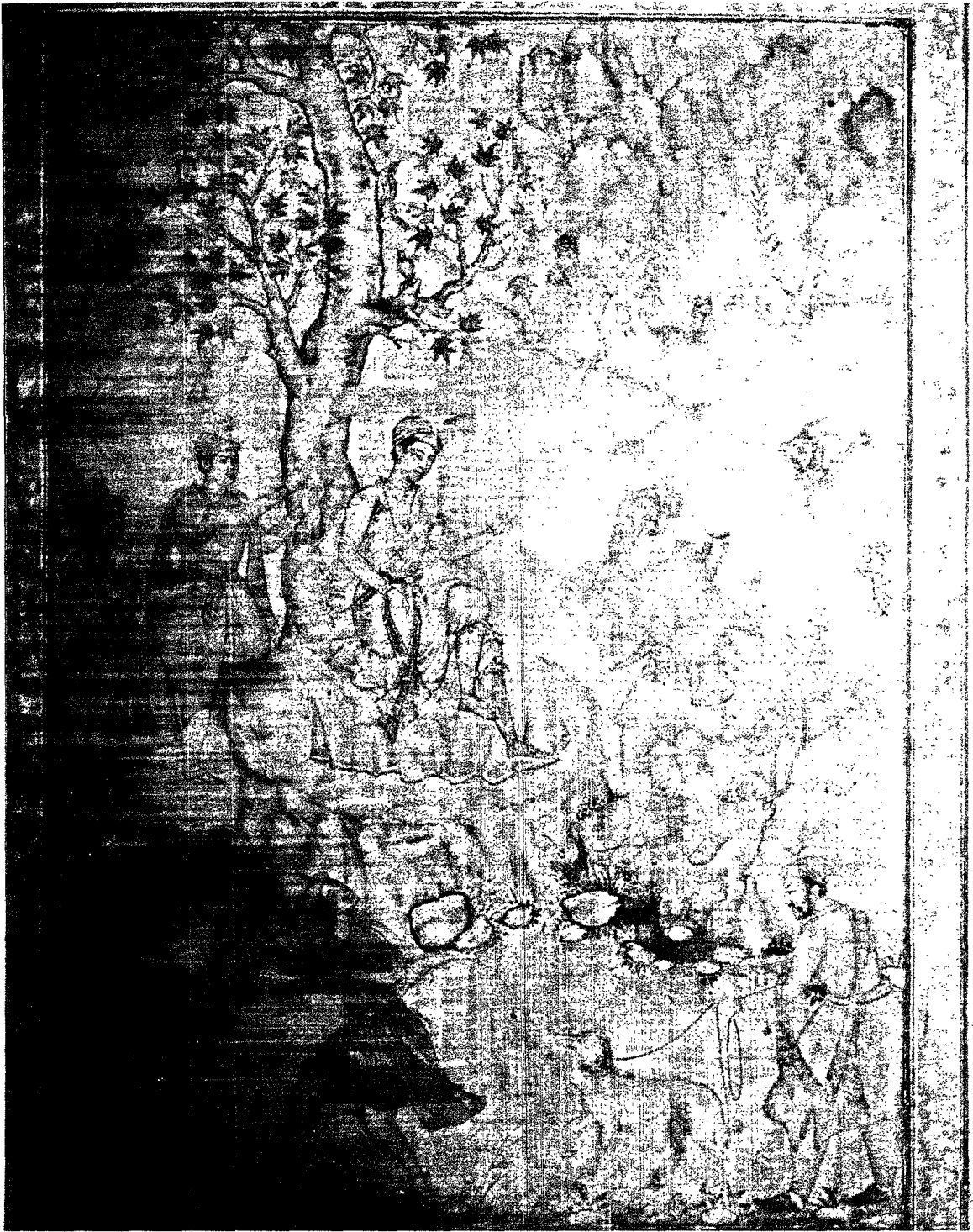


Fig. 2. Akbar and a dervish. By 'Abd al-Samad. Mughal, ca. 1585. 23.1 × 16 cm. Geneva, Collection Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, M. 147.



Fig. 3. 'Abd al-Rahim Istakhri prays while out hunting and is watched by a young man. By Padaratha. Mughal, 1604-5. 22 × 12.1 cm. *Nafahāt al-Uns*, London, British Library, Or. 1362, fol. 150a.



Fig. 4. Abu al-Husayn Qarafi foresees a vision of married bliss for Abu Bakr Duqqi. Attributed here to Govardhana. Mughal, 1604-5. 18.1 × 10.1 cm. *Nafahāt al-Uns*, London, British Library, Or. 1362, fol. 142a.

ther exclusively Persianate or European-inspired, nor *nīm qalam* or fully colored. In short, there is no consistent taste exhibited here save for a preference for highly detailed and finely worked paintings. This becomes clear by comparison with a finished drawing of an elephant named Ganesha, which bears a cursive inscription reading *chahārum* (fourth) in the upper right (fig. 5). Since it is very implausible that a painting would be made of an inferior elephant, this inscription must refer not to the class of elephant but to the fourth-class quality of the painting, evident most obviously in the creature's unnuanced contours and regular texture.⁹ Moreover, the date of this Mughal painting, which is 1647 at the latest, demonstrates that the system of qualitative assessment

continued at least sporadically at the Mughal court beyond ca. 1605.¹⁰

The recognition of this verbal system of evaluation has led me to give serious consideration to a hitherto unnoticed series of numbers written on some thirty late-sixteenth-century Mughal paintings, nearly all of which apparently were once part of the collection of Mme. Duffeuty in Paris, and many of which are now preserved in the Musée Guimet.¹¹ These numbers, which normally appear in the lower corners of the paintings, are always 1, 2, or 3; occasionally, individual elements within a painting actually have separate enumerations. Both these features preclude the usual function of such numbers, that is, as the enumeration of folios within an album. More-

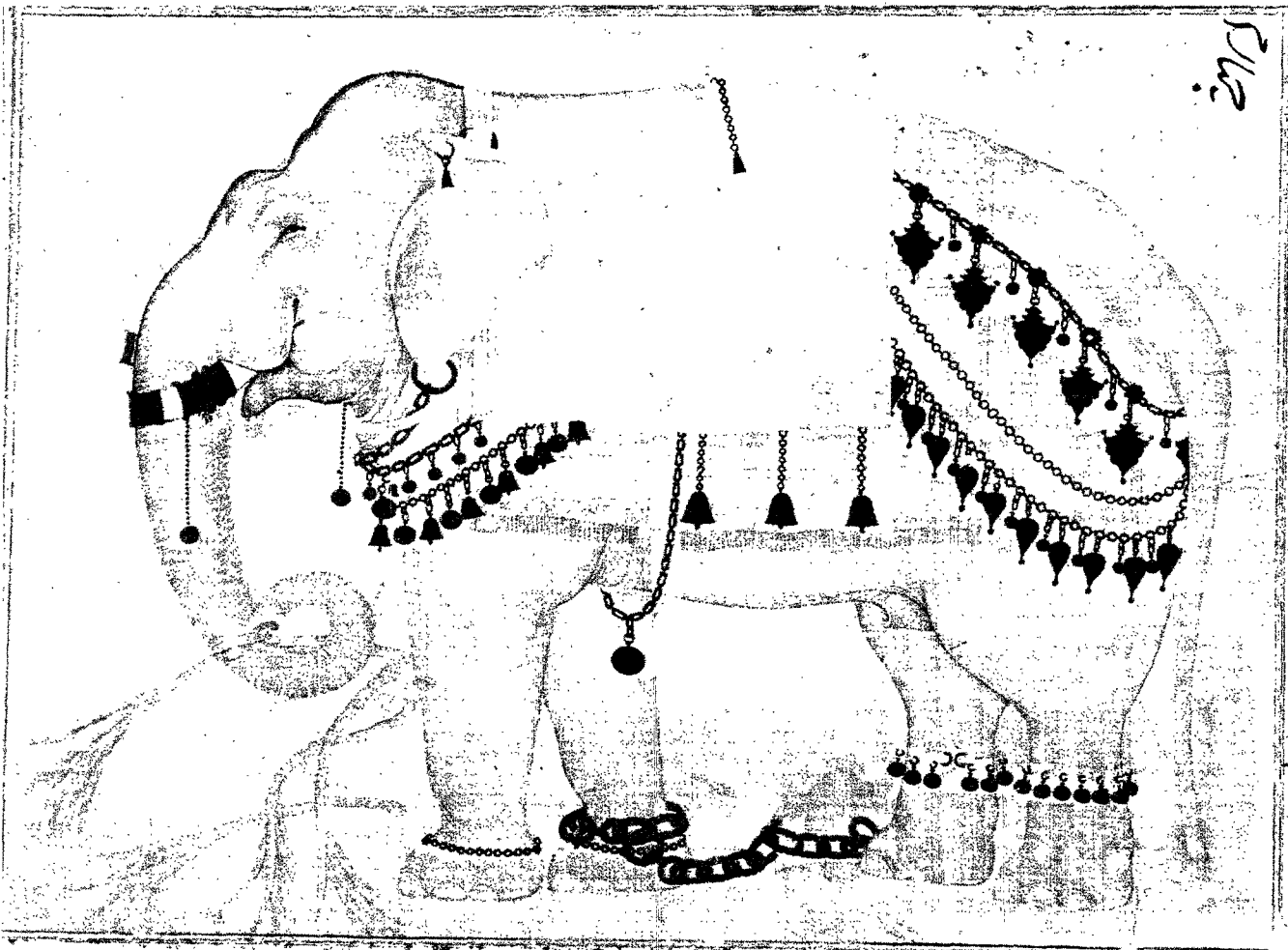


Fig. 5. The elephant Ganesha. Mughal, ca. 1647. 16.6 × 22.1 cm. Geneva, Collection Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, M. 244.

over, these numerical notations seem contemporary with the paintings on which they occur, for many are written very near the ascriptions. Some numbers are written in an ungainly hand, with large bowls for the numerals 2 and 3, but at least as many are written in a hand consistent with the accompanying ascriptions, which are unfailingly accurate, even in the case of obscure painters whose names would not have been known in later generations or centuries. What can these numbers mean? One possibility is that they are part of a much later ranking system designed for commercial use, but as several art dealers have remarked anecdotally, no one would defile a work which he intended to offer for sale by writing on the face of the painting, nor would anyone with even a modicum of commercial astuteness rank a work in such a transparent code.

The other possibility is that these numbers belong not to a modern code, but to a historical one, and that they are nothing less than the numerical equivalent of the verbal system of qualitative assessment with which I began. At first, such a record of the Mughal reception of painting seems too good to be true, but years of uncovering similar evidence from the Mughal painting workshop and library have taught me never to underestimate the Mughal penchant for documentation. The extensiveness and precise calibrations of this documentation afford unprecedented insight into a Mughal code of connoisseurship, which appears to have operated in a manner surprisingly similar to our own. Indeed, the most striking aspect of this brand of connoisseurship is that it goes beyond the mere determination of authorship and the desire for verisimilitude that preoccupied Jahan-gir and evaluates a broad range of formal properties intrinsic to the individual work of art.

The principles of this code of connoisseurship can be demonstrated with a series of three paintings of ca. 1590 of assorted birds—each by a different Mughal artist, and each with a different numerical ranking. The first work within this genre of bird paintings is ascribed to Miskin, a well-known artist who contributed to most of the finest manuscripts of the late sixteenth century (fig. 6). Part of the painting's powerful visual appeal is surely due to the brilliant plumage of its subjects, but still more must be attributed to the inventive interaction between the male and female of the three pairs, particularly the lowermost pair of horned owls, who scrutinize one another with wizened disdain. The Mughal connoisseur rec-

ognized this masterful characterization of the birds' surface and nature with the word *awwal* (first-class) written faintly to the right of the ascription. Yet this assessment must govern the painting as a whole, for written beneath two individual birds in the upper right is the number 3, effectively relegating these two creatures to a lower level of achievement. A painting signed by Mani, a third-tier Mughal painter, presents a larger congregation of birds organized not in pairs, but around the voluminous trunk of a single tree (fig. 7). The strength of this painting is obviously neither composition nor color—the latter being practically absent from the work—but draftsmanship, evident most impressively in the rhythmic forms of the three largest birds. A number 2 in the lower left testifies to the respectable but hardly remarkable level of accomplishment. The third painting in this series of bird paintings marks a still lower qualitative tier with the number 3 written in the same hand as the ascription to Isma'il, a virtually unknown painter, and written again above each member of the lower pair (fig. 8).¹² There is little reason to take issue with this judgment, which must have been based upon the exceedingly prosaic treatment of the birds' positions and feathers and the rudimentary flowering plants filling the space around them. Thus, although the Mughal connoisseurs did not offer a verbal rationale for these rankings, we find it relatively easy to do so ourselves. More important, the numerical evaluations correspond very closely to our own, for who among us would rank these paintings in a different order?

A second feature of this code of connoisseurship is that it was objective enough that the qualitative ranking of a given work was not predetermined by the status of its artist. This feature can be demonstrated by the qualitative gradations within the figurative work of each of three different artists. The first of these is Mir Sayyid 'Ali, one of the two masters brought by Humayun from Persia in the early 1550's to direct the fledgling Mughal atelier. Mir Sayyid 'Ali's image of a scholar poring over a book is one of the finest of all early Mughal drawings, and is rated first-class by the word *awwal* written discreetly in the lower right (fig. 9). Most striking is the figure's extraordinary pensiveness, an expression created initially by his upturned eyebrows, fixed gaze, and slightly pursed lips, and more subtly by the position of the head, which rests wearily on a hand whose fingers play distractedly over his brow. Other engaging aspects include the delicately colored shawl that frames the



Fig. 6. Ten birds. By Miskina. Mughal, ca. 1590. 27.8 × 14.7 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet, no. 3619, A.



Fig. 7. A congregation of birds. By Mani. Mughal, ca. 1590-1600. 14.1 × 20.1 cm. Geneva, Collection Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan.

bearded face and sweeps transparently across the scholar's back and waist, and the flaring sash that echoes and answers the curves of his left knee and thigh. But I believe that the feature that most distinguished this drawing from its painted counterpart (fig. 10) is the volume of the scholar's torso, established on one side by the shawl and the very convincing gesture of the left hand cupped about his thigh, and on the other by the elbow planted lightly on a cushion. Compare this to the elegant, but volumetrically unarticulated body seen in Mir Sayyid 'Ali's portrait of his father, in which the artist forgoes even a hint of three-dimensionality at the figure's waist, which by rights should be torqued in a nearly identical manner (fig. 10).¹³ Mir Sayyid 'Ali maintains this same preference for flattened shapes in the unnaturally displayed scroll and in the hands that bracket it. Despite the very dignified face of the subject and the

overall clarity of the form, the painting was evaluated no higher than third-class, a ranking conveyed by the number 3 written beside the figure's head. In short, the formal properties of the work were paramount in this system of aesthetic judgment, and even a painting by so eminent an artist as Mir Sayyid 'Ali could be found wanting.

Along with Mir Sayyid 'Ali, Basavana is one of the few Mughal artists to merit even a brief laudatory description of his work in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, the official chronicle of Akbar's court.¹⁴ It is hardly surprising, then, that as many as five of his works are inscribed with the number 1 as a mark of their superior accomplishment. Typical of these is a masterful drawing of a dervish and his dog (fig. 11). Basavana attends to the requisite external attributes of a mendicant by endowing the figure with a wiry body and a gaunt face whose craggy features echo those of the



Fig. 8. Four birds. By Isma'il. Mughal, ca. 1590-1600. 17.1 × 10.9 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet, 3619, M, a.



Fig. 9. Pensive scholar before a book. By Mir Sayyid 'Ali. Mughal, ca. 1565-70. 14 × 9.5 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet, EO 3577 (b).



Fig. 10. Portrait of Mir Musawwir. By Mir Sayyid 'Ali. Mughal, ca. 1565. 12 × 11.1 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet, 3619, I, b.



Fig. 11. Dervish and his dog. By Basavana. Mughal, ca. 1590. 13.1 × 7.5 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet, 3619, G, b.

bird-headed crook that he carries. At the same time, Basavana captures the more elusive spirit of a seeker by having the dervish fix his gaze steadfastly on the lightly colored flower that he holds in his other hand. Most of all, the artist renders texture with unprecedented sensitivity, so that the woolly hat, heavy animal pelt, coarse lower garment, and even the scruffy beard and body hair all become palpable. Yet Basavana occasionally falls short of his own standard of naturalism. One work in which he does so depicts a Europeanized female seated before an aged man with a book, perhaps a loose adaptation of St. Luke painting the Virgin (fig. 12).¹⁵ The woman's left knee protrudes, and her robe wraps about her torso and billows up behind her head, but the overall effect seems more contrived than convincing, an impression reinforced by the sight of the cloak of her male companion fluttering in exactly the opposite direction. Add to this the odd emotional detachment of the two figures, whose stares fail to engage one another despite the figures' proximity, and we can appreciate the sophisticated aesthetic discrimination that led to this painting being assessed as second-class, an evaluation recorded by the number 2 scrawled in the lower left.

A greater qualitative gap may be seen in two paintings by Jagajivana, an artist of above-average ability. The first is a version of the familiar scene of a master and his pupil (fig. 13). Tucked into the corner of the brown tilework supporting the platform is Jagajivana's microscopic signature; just above the writing box is a faint number 3 signifying third-class.¹⁶ Both figures are stock types, with their difference in status conveyed by size, pose, and facial hair. Their clothing is equally nondescript. The master's green robe has the strengthened contours and internal folds that Mughal artists began to employ in response to their initial exposure to European conventions, but its overall shape is more a matter of abstract curves and hooks than one describing a body enveloped in cloth. The arrangement of porch and courtyard is standard, and the patterns of tilework, carpets, and half-open doors are routine. The fact that there are dozens of comparable works in contemporary manuscripts such as the Beatty *Tuṭīnāma* and the British Library *Dārābnāma* suggests that paintings rated as third-class works were not only acceptable, but were probably the norm.¹⁷ But Jagajivana was occasionally moved to do more inspired work, such as his image of a man playing a zither, inscribed with the artist's name

and the number 1 in the lower right (fig. 14). The man's thin nose, narrow-set eyes, and wispy beard certainly make for an unusual facial type, but the most captivating feature of this first-class painting is the marvelously mannered treatment of the curtains, whose quickened linear rhythm is carried over into the man's fringed cloak. Once we understand that not all work was judged against the standard of naturalism pioneered by Basavana, we can easily recognize the appeal of the painting's vibrant design and color, the former seen most strikingly in the braided pattern of dado tilework, the star-shaped tiles above, and even the coiled pose of the cat, and the latter in the electric red curtains, the startling pairing of bright turquoise vessels and red shoes, and the deep blue vases punctuating a tawny environment.

If subtle refinements within a pair of paintings sometimes elevate one work to a higher qualitative class, at other times they do not. We can see this phenomenon in the work of Husayn, who supplied an occasional painting to manuscripts of the 1580's, but whose specialty was illumination, a genre in which he is known from rare signed works.¹⁸ Traces of this art appear in all his paintings; in an enigmatic image of a woman receiving an offering of a large fish, for example, the woman's dress is an obvious reconfiguration of a pattern normally applied to a decorative heading or carpet (fig. 15). Even this sparkling passage does not raise the painting as a whole above third-class work, a rating noted discreetly below the supplicant's leg. In fact, there is little else to commend in the painting: the male's face and tunic are handled in predictable fashion, and the woman's face and cloak remain blunt and inexpressive. Indeed, their commonplaceness becomes apparent by comparison to another work which manipulates the fantastic imagery of Tobias and the angel (fig. 16).¹⁹ Here Husayn uses a still more brilliant pattern for the golden lower garment, but complements it with an interesting, deeply furrowed cloak, a flamboyant pair of wings with modeled feathers, and an exuberant vegetal crown set atop a lovely three-dimensional head. And having noted the pictorial setting, whose rock-lined stream and delicate floral sprays almost certainly carried more aesthetic prestige in Mughal culture than the ornamental golden forms in the background of the previous painting, we can readily imagine how this image of an angel would be regarded more favorably than Husayn's other work. At first, a faint vertical mark above the ascription to Husayn in the



Fig. 12. Europeanized woman and an old man. By Basavana. Mughal, ca. 1590. 20.3 × 9.8 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet, 3619, J, b.

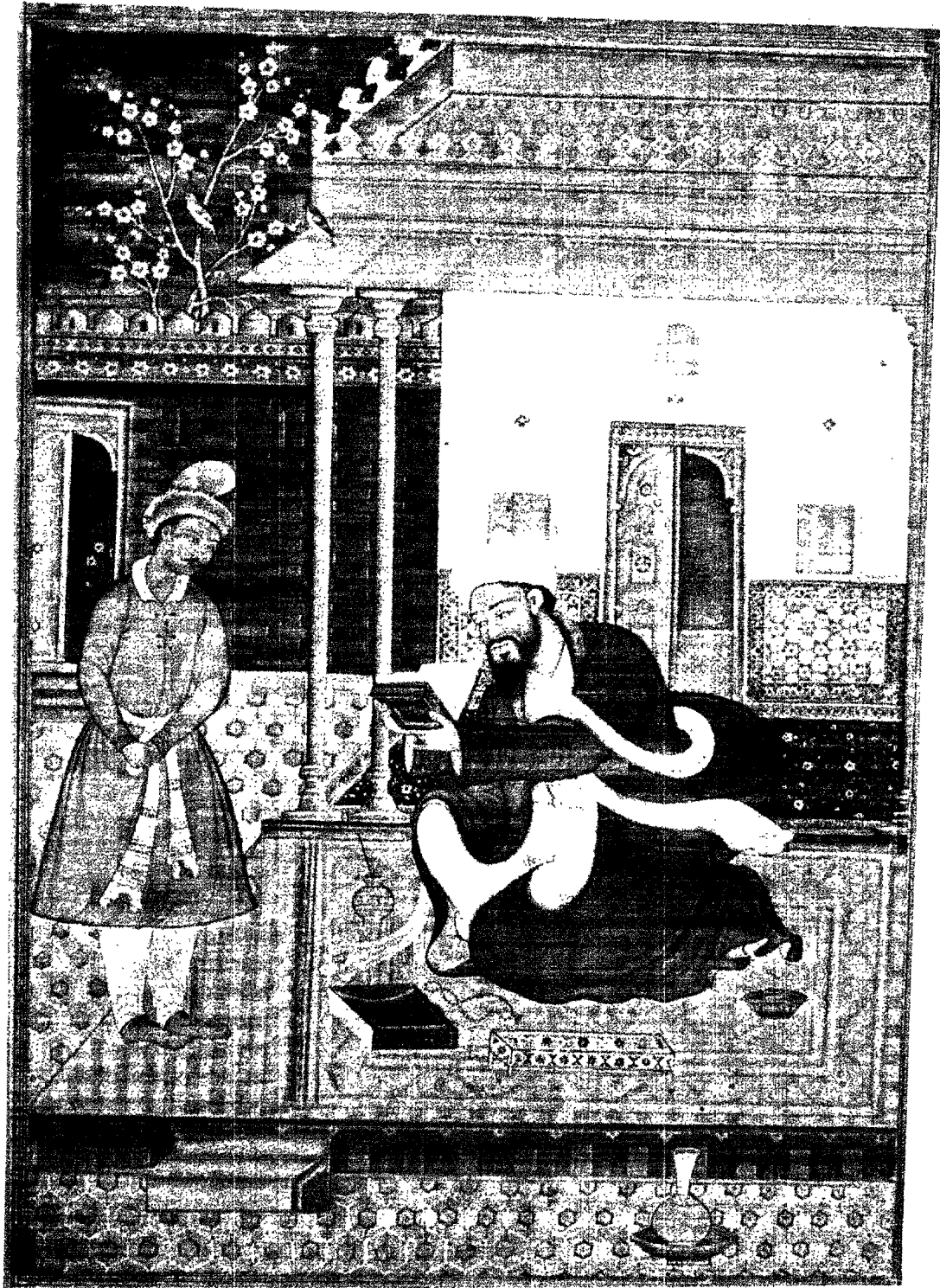


Fig. 13. Teacher and pupil. By Jagajivana. Mughal, ca. 1575-80. 21.3 × 14.9 cm. San Diego Museum of Art, 1990.0275 (Edwin Binney 3rd Collection).



Fig. 14. Man playing a zither. By Jagajivana. Mughal, ca. 1590. 16.9 × 9.4 cm. Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Ms. 44.7.



Fig. 15. A man offers a fish to a woman. By Husayn. Mughal, ca. 1590–1600. 19.2 × 12.6 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet EO 3576.



Fig. 16. The angel of Tobias. By Husayn. Mughal, ca. 1590–1600. 18.8 × 13.2 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet, 3619, H, a.

lower right corner of the painting seems to corroborate this, for it is plausibly read as the number 1, thereby signifying first-class work. But this conclusion is belied by a fuller view of the lower border, in whose center an unequivocal number 3 appears.²⁰ Thus, for all the refinements that we perceive in the latter image, the Mughals still relegated the painting to the third class of quality. The modest qualitative ranking of this last pair of paintings suggests that outright decorativeness was not accorded much value in this system of connoisseurship, probably because it was perceived to have limited expressive potential.

Conversely, paintings with a strong sense of expressiveness consistently earned the highest numerical ratings in this system. Compare Husayn's version of the angel of Tobias, which for all its technical brilliance received no better than a third-class ranking, with Basavana's, which was acclaimed as first-class work (fig. 17). Basavana's female once more has clothing which gathers in voluminous folds between her breasts and legs and is draped generously about her feet, but this time her face, rendered with a granular system of modeling unique in this period, is engaged in the scene as she smiles serenely at her leaf-winged companion with the intense expression. Yet while these two figures are as compelling as any in Mughal painting, other subordinate portions of the drawing, though unquestionably by Basavana himself, are not. It may seem fastidious to make such a distinction between the quality of individual components of a painting, but the Mughals actually did so. The downgrading of specific motifs to third-class quality is the only plausible explanation for the number 3 that appears above the fawn in the lower left and below the dog in the lower right despite an overall rating of the painting as first-class.

This process of making qualitative distinctions on practically a figure-by-figure basis works in the opposite direction as well. A painting by Mani, another painter of average ability, is recorded as third-class work in the number 3 written beside the ascription (fig. 18). But in this coterie of ash-smeared ascetics, two figures are singled out for special praise: the figure in the lower right corner who turns to cast a side-long glance toward the viewer, and the large figure in the upper left whose upraised eyebrows and gaping mouth animate him in an endearing way. Accordingly, both figures were judged to be second-class quality, a rating recorded in the number 2 written directly below or beside them.

Although the thirty-seven annotated paintings that I have discovered thus far represent no more than a minuscule percentage of extant Mughal paintings, together they document the existence of a hitherto unknown contemporary code of connoisseurship at the Mughal court.²¹ We should view their fortuitous survival as we do the similarly limited numbers of Mughal paintings which bear ascriptions, dates, and painter's directions, all of which we accept as incomplete, but crucial evidence of practices which we now understand to have been standard at the Mughal painting workshop. Although I am reassured by the fact that the paintings with numerical rankings of quality come from both albums and manuscripts, I have no explanation why so many are concentrated in the last two decades of the sixteenth century. The aesthetic evaluations discussed here were probably not those of the Mughal emperors themselves, who probably would have written at least some of them in their own hand. In no case can the numerical or verbal ratings or their accompanying ascriptions be linked to Akbar, who wrote practically nothing, or to Jahangir, whose idiosyncratic handwriting is easily recognizable.

Instead, I consider these notations and the aesthetic judgments they represent to lie within the purview of the librarians who oversaw the production and preservation of these works. To note—if only occasionally—which paintings were deemed superior, above average, or mediocre would have been a relatively minor enhancement of the already voluminous information compiled on the activities of the imperial workshop. But for an anonymous librarian to do so would also mean that standards of aesthetic quality were probably less a matter of personal taste than one of consensus, however much that consensus had been shaped by members of the imperial family. This assessment of quality accords well with what we have seen in this sequence of paintings and in the development of sixteenth-century Mughal painting generally: an appreciation of fine drawing, a growing preference for volume and texture over elegant line and unmodulated color, and a taste for figures with some sense of an inner life or psychological presence.²² In this aesthetic system, the subject of paintings was of little consequence, so that two paintings of the same subject could be rated quite differently or a painting of birds could be rated higher artistically than a nominally auspicious one of holy men.²³

Together with the few remarks on aesthetics found



Fig. 17. Tobias and the angel. By Basavana. Mughal, ca. 1590-95. 15.7 × 10.7 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 18. A gathering of ascetics around a fire. By Mani. Mughal, ca. 1590–95. 19.7 × 13.6 cm. Paris, Musée Guimet, 3619, F, a.

in contemporary Mughal literary sources, this newly discovered code of connoisseurship allows us to proceed with greater confidence in our assumption that the hierarchy of artists and qualities of painting established in twentieth-century scholarship on Mughal art does approximate that of the Mughals' own aesthetic system. Two historical circumstances probably contributed to the aesthetic affinity that Western art historians have had with Mughal painting. The first is that early European travelers and later scholars recognized almost unconsciously the Western visual values incorporated into Mughal painting practically from its inception. The second is that the visually explicit forms of Mughal painting are easily understood by a culturally uninitiated audience, requiring much less familiarity with the literary and religious ideals that underpin many other varieties of Islamic and Indian painting. Only in the late twentieth century has this "libertarian" aesthetic attitude toward Islamic and Indian painting begun to be tempered by a serious concern with the responses of audiences involved in the commissioning and making of these paintings.²⁴ Rarely will the evidence of these historical responses be as conspicuous and concrete as the numerical qualitative assessments discussed here, but a directed study of sources as seemingly tangential as treatises on calligraphy, the composition of albums of paintings produced in earlier periods, and the valuations written on individual manuscripts and paintings will ultimately yield a more accurate picture of the criteria used to evaluate the visual arts at different times throughout the Islamic world.

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APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL MUGHAL PAINTINGS ANNOTATED WITH NUMERICAL RANKINGS

First Class

Horse and groom. Attributed to 'Abd al-Samad. ca. 1585. No. 1 written in the lower right. Musée Guimet no. 3619, L, a. Published: Sheila Canby, "The Horses of 'Abd us-Samad," in *Mughal Masters: Further Studies* (Mumbai, 1998), fig. 6; Amina Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale* (Paris, 1989), no. 28.

Shaykh al-Islam Ahmad al-Namiqi al-Jami attempts to fetch wine with an ass. By Balacanda. Dated 1604-5. *Awwal* written in the lower margin. British Library

Nafahāt al-Uns, fol. 226b. Published: Milo Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting* (Cambridge, 1992), fig. 46. Man playing a flute. By Basavana. ca. 1590-95. No. 1 written in the right corner. Musée Guimet no. 3619, G, a. Published: Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, no. 51.

Seated Man. By Basavana. ca. 1585-90. No. 1 written beside the lute. Freer Gallery of Art 53.60. Published: Milo Beach, *The Imperial Image* (Washington, D.C., 1981), no. 25.

Woman standing on the head of a monster. By Basavana. ca. 1590-95. No. 1 written in the lower right. Musée Guimet no. 3619, G, d. Published: Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, no. 56.

Portrait of Mukhlis Khan. By Mahabbat. ca. 1624. *Awwal* written on the reverse along with numerous inspection notes and seals of Shah Jahan's reign. Spink & Sons, London. Published: John Seyller, "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library," *Artibus Asiae* 57, nos. 3-4 (1997): 346.

Second Class

Prince and astrologers. By Basavana. ca. 1590-95. No. 2 written in the lower right; no. 2 altered from no. 3 in the lower center, no. 3 written to the right of the monkey. Musée Guimet EO 3577 (a). Published: Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, no. 29.

Two ascetics. By Basavana. ca. 1590-95. No. 2 written in the lower right. Private collection. Unpublished.

Prince holding a falcon. By Mansur. ca. 1600. No. 2 written in the lower border and to the left of the falcon. Musée Guimet no. 3619, C. Published: Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, no. 49.

Dervish. By Mukunda. ca. 1590-95. No. 2 written beside the figure. Private collection. Published: *In the Image of Man* (London, 1982), no. 267.

Two men attack a lion mauling a man. By Shiva-dasa. ca. 1595. Nos. 2 and 3 written above the lion. Musée Guimet no. 3619, F, c. Unpublished.

Eight birds. By Tulasi Kalan. ca. 1590-95. No. 2 written in the lower right, no. 2 between the lowermost pair, no. 3 beneath each member of the next pair, and no. 3 between the uppermost pair. Musée Guimet no. 3619, A, b. Published: Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, no. 17.

A lion at rest. Unascribed. ca. 1590. No. 2 written beneath the insect in the upper left, no. 3 written

beside the bird in the upper right. Metropolitan Museum of Art 1985.221. Published: Stuart Cary Welch, *India: Art and Culture 1300–1900* (New York, 1985), no. 104.

Two magpies. Unascribed. ca. 1590. No. 2 written in the lower right. Musée Guimet no. 3619, Q, b. Unpublished.

Third Class

Master and pupil. By Jagana. ca. 1585–90. No. 3 written to the right of the master's head; no. 2(?) written in the lower right beside the ascription. Keir Collection. Published: Basil Robinson et al., *Islamic Art in the Keir Collection* (London, 1988), P 11a.

Falconer. By Khema Karana. ca. 1585. No. 3 written in the lower right and to the right of the falcon. Musée Guimet no. 3619, K, b. Published: Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, no. 30.

Old man writing beneath a tree. By Lala. ca. 1590. No. 3 written in the lower right, and to the right of the man's head. Musée Guimet no. 3619, I, c. Published: Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, no. 44.

Four birds. By Mahesa. ca. 1590. No. 3 written in the lower right, no. 3 written between each pair of birds. Musée Guimet no. 9145. Unpublished.

Jesuit missionary. By Manohara. ca. 1595–1600. No. 3 written below the dog in the lower right. Musée Guimet no. 3619, G, c. Published: Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale*, no. 59.

Four pigeons. Unascribed. ca. 1590–1600. No. 3 written below each of the birds. Musée Guimet no. 3619, P, b. Unpublished.

NOTES

1. Jahangir, *The Tizuk-i-Jahāngīr; or Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. A. Rogers and ed. H. Beveridge, 2 vols. (rpt. London, 1968), 1: 21.
2. The changes concerned the degree of fleshiness and shape of the chin of 'Abdullah Khan, an Uzbek ruler who died in 1598, about twenty years before this episode occurred. A sketch of this figure hawking is preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (14.647), and finished paintings by Abu al-Hasan are in the Victoria and Albert Museum (I.M. 20–1925) and the Rampur Raza Library (Album 4 [3]). An account of this exchange is published in "Mutribi" al-Asamm Samarqandi, *Conversations with Jahangir* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1998), pp. 128–29. A number of other portraits are inscribed in Jahangir's hand with the phrase "a good likeness of," which once more speaks to the issue of verisimilitude. Two examples of this type of validation by Jahangir—once for a figure with whom he was intimately familiar, and the other unknown to him save by reputation—are reproduced in John Seyller, "Hashim," in *Master Artists of the Imperial Mughal Court*, ed. Pratapatidya Pal (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1991), figs. 3, 5.
3. John Seyller, "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library," *Artibus Asiae* 57, nos. 3–4 (1997): 243–349.
4. Stuart Cary Welch in Anthony Welch and Stuart Cary Welch, *Arts of the Islamic Book: The Collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan* (Ithaca and London, 1982), p. 167, first proposed that Basavana collaborated with 'Abd al-Samad on the painting. This scenario is accepted by Sheila Canby, *Princes, Poets & Paladins* (London: The British Museum, 1998), p. 111.
5. British Library Or. 1362. Of the original total of thirty paintings, seventeen remain in the manuscript and six detached paintings are in the Chester Beatty Library. See Jeremiah Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library Board, 1982), no. 69; and Linda Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 2 vols. (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 1: 310–20.
6. The painting is published in Ellen Smart, "Balchand," in *Master Artists of the Imperial Mughal Court*, ed. Pal, fig. 3.
7. Govardhana contributed two of the six paintings in the Royal Library *Khamisa* of Mir 'Ali Shir Nava'i. See Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*, no. 77, for a discussion of the manuscript. Govardhana's paintings are reproduced in color in Milo Beach, "Govardhan: 'Servant of Jahangir'" in *Mughal Masters: Further Studies*, ed. Asok Das (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1998), figs. 2–3.
8. Moreover, not every painting in the manuscript by these artists is marked in this way. Another painting attributed to Padaratha (fol. 69a) bears no such indication of quality.
9. According to Abu 'l-Fazl, imperial elephants were placed into one of seven qualitative categories, which were determined by the creature's character, size, and age. See *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, 3 vols., trans. H. Blochmann (rpt. Delhi, 1978), 1: 131.
10. The drawing is published in Canby, *Princes, Poets & Paladins*, no. 117, as a work of Bijapur, ca. 1645. But eight seals and seven inspection notes establish that the painting was always in the Mughal library. The earliest of the latter records that the painting was entrusted to Muhammad Masun on 28 Jumada I year 21 [4 June 1647]. A *raqam* notation gives the value of the painting as 7 [rupees]. The style in which the word *chahārūm* is written supports its contemporaneity with the drawing. The elephant, who is named in the upper border as Ganesha, must be the same creature as one of the same name depicted in a painting in the collection of Howard Hodgkin; that painting is published in Andrew Topsfield and Milo Beach, *Indian Paintings and Drawings from the Collection of Howard Hodgkin* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), no. 11. The fully painted image, which also includes the figures of a prince and two courtiers, was given a valuation of 30 rupees, suggesting that color and the presence of ancillary figures—particularly ones of high station—enhanced at least the monetary value of a painting, if not necessarily its aesthetic ranking.
11. Thirty-six pages from an album formerly in the collection of Mme. Duffeuty were presented to the Louvre in 1894; the fourteen remaining ones were offered for sale at Galerie Jean Soustiel, *Miniatures orientales de l'Inde* 4 (1986). Many, but not all, of the fifty painted folios of this album are

- marked with numerical rankings. Some are also inscribed faintly in pencil with the name of Khurd Kabul, an inscription deciphered by Wheeler Thackston, who identified the name as a village outside Kabul. It is likely that this is an informal record of the place where the paintings were acquired in the nineteenth century.
12. The fact that Isma'il would not be known from later lists of artists supports the contemporaneity of the ascription and its numerical evaluation.
 13. A. S. Melekian-Chirvani, "Mir Sayyed 'Ali: Painter of the Past and Pioneer of the Future," in *Mughal Masters: Further Studies*, ed. A. Das, pp. 39–40, argues that since the language of the petition on the scroll refers to the figure as Mir Musawwir, the painting must also be by him rather than Mir Sayyid 'Ali.
 14. See *Ā'in-i Akbarī* 1: 114: "In back grounding, drawing of features, distribution of colours, portrait painting, and several other branches, he is most excellent, so much so that many critics prefer him to Daswanth."
 15. Amina Okada, *Miniatures de l'Inde impériale* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989), p. 190.
 16. This signature was discovered and kindly brought to my attention by Ellen Smart.
 17. Works of similar composition and quality appear on fols. 5a, 29b, 30b, 31b, 33a, 41a, 66a, 86a, 93a, 96a, 115a, and 138a of the Chester Beatty Library *Tūẓīnāma* (Ms. 21), and fols. 37a, 47b, 81a, 88b, 117a, 122a, and 132a in the British Library *Dārābnāma* (Or. 4615). Both manuscripts also have comparable illustrations which I would rate as still lower in quality, making it likely that the qualitative scale normally extended to a fourth and even fifth class. See, for example, fols. 26a, 78a, 85b, 106a, 123b, 134a, 139b of the former manuscript, and fols. 62a, 73b, and 93b of the latter.
 18. The signed illuminations appear on fols. 42a and 174b of the 1597-98 *Khamsa* of Amir Khusraw in the Walters Art Gallery (W. 624).
 19. For a discussion of this theme in Mughal painting, see Amina Okada, "Les peintres moghols et le thème de Tobie et l'Ange," *Arts Asiatiques* 43 (1988): 5-12.
 20. A better image of this number appears in the image reproduced in Okada, "Les peintres moghols et le thème de Tobie et l'Ange," fig. 1.
 21. The paintings with these numerical assessments that are not discussed in the article proper are listed in the Appendix.
 22. This last aspect is corroborated to some extent by a statement in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* 1: 103, in which Abu 'l-Fazl draws an unfavorable comparison between the potency of painting and that of writing, "But though it is true that painters, especially those of Europe, succeed in drawing figures expressive of the conceptions which the artist has of any of the mental states, so much so, that people may mistake a picture for a reality. . . ."
 23. See, for example, the two versions of the angel of Tobias (figs. 16-17) and the two paintings by Mani (figs. 7, 18).
 24. For a cogent description of this outlook and related approaches, see Oleg Grabar, "Toward an Aesthetic of Persian Painting," *The Art of Interpreting: Papers in Art History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 129-39. An interesting case study of contemporary painting in Orissa is presented by Joanna Williams, "Criticizing and Evaluating the Visual Arts in India: A Preliminary Example," *Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 1 (1988): 3-28.